



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

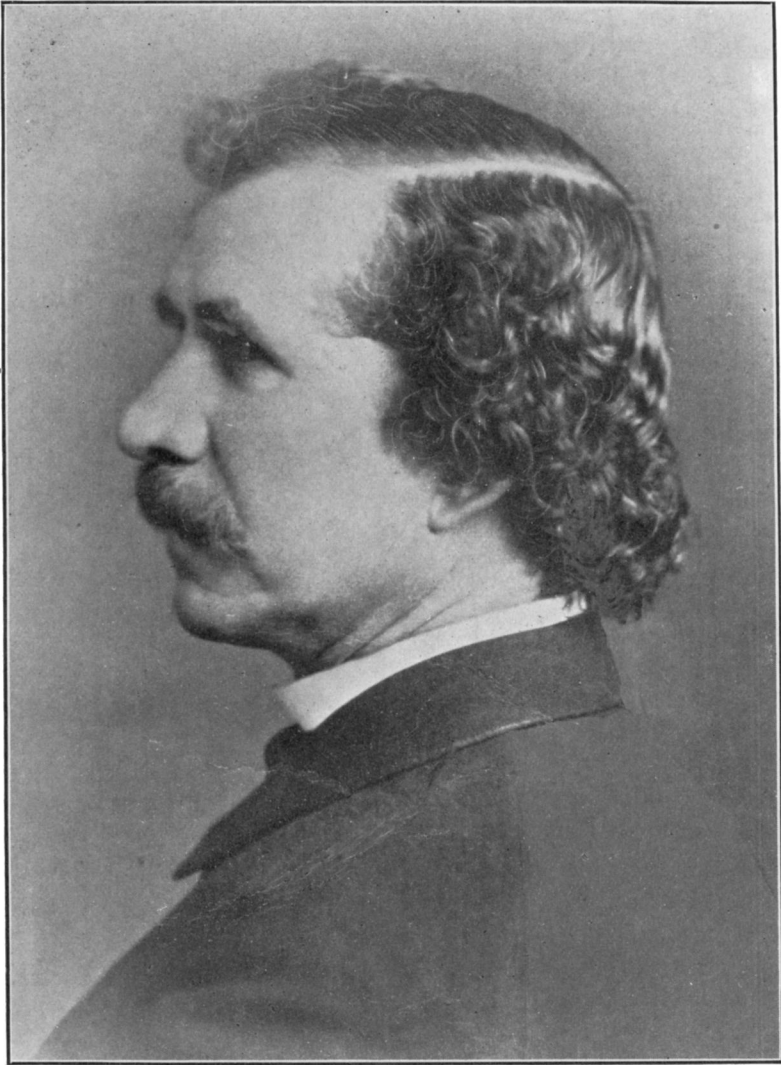
This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



GEORGE P. A. HEALY

George Peter Alexander Healy*.

By Mrs. William R. Sandham.

Somewhere about the year 1785, in green Ireland, a mother named Healy gave birth to a baby boy, who, while still a boy, took to a seafaring life, and in the course of time came to Boston and became a prosperous sea captain. In the early part of the year 1812, with a war with England looming big on the horizon, Captain Healy was in charge of a merchant ship, with all his possessions invested in its cargo. An English privateer captured the ship and confiscated the cargo. Before starting on this ill fated voyage Captain Healy had fallen in love and became engaged to a Miss Mary Hicks, a Boston lass of the tender age of 15 years. The now impoverished captain offered to release her, but she firmly refused to break the engagement, and they were soon after happily married. As a result of this marriage, a boy was born in Boston January 15, 1813, and they named him George Peter Alexander. The boy was destined to become one of the foremost and most prolific portrait painters of his time. We can truly say that he was famous, as he had for his sitters a great many of the most noted American statesmen and numerous prominent people in Europe. We can also truly say that he was a prolific painter, as it can be authenticated that he painted not less than 800 portraits during his life of 81 years, besides painting a great many pictures that are not portraits.

In early boyhood young Healy did not show any indications of becoming an artist, although perhaps he inherited the artistic instinct from his Grandmother Hicks. His father was not a financial success on land, and he early became im-

*A paper read before the Woman's Tuesday Club of Wyoming, Illinois, November 16, 1915.

bued with the idea of helping his mother, who was a frail and delicate woman, with five small children for whom to care. He himself said that he became his mother's right-hand man. He also said: "American boys of my time were ever ready and willing to do anything to earn an honest penny, from clearing the snow from rich men's sidewalks to sweeping a merchant's store, and they thought none the less of themselves for their hard work." Though frail, the mother was an energetic woman. In his *Reminiscences of a Portrait Painter* Mr. Healy tells that when he was 12 years old he caught a cold in his left leg and the muscles became so contracted that the doctors decided that amputation was necessary. One day his mother told him to straighten his leg as much as he could, and she suddenly sat on it with all the force she possessed. The boy screamed with excruciating pain, and then fainted. He did not lose his leg nor was he afterwards lame.

The revelation of his artistic talent did not come to young Healy until he was 16 years old. He was watching some companions amuse themselves coloring prints, and one of them challenged him to try it, which he did with such success that he was accused of having painted before. Then and there he resolved to become an artist, and the resolution was ever before him. He commenced to draw, and though he met many obstacles he never wavered, never even hesitated. He drew pictures of everything he saw. When he had no money to buy pencils, he drew with charcoal, on the floor, on the walls, everywhere, but with no encouragement from his people. Even his grandmother frowned on his work. Artists seemed a queer foreign growth, unfit for American soil. In spite of opposition, he kept on, quietly and cheerfully. Accidentally he met a daughter of the artist, Stuart, and she loaned him a print from Guido Reni's *Ecce Homo*. This he copied on canvas, and with the presumption of extreme youth, induced a friendly book seller to exhibit it in his window. A Catholic priest from a country parish passed that way and asked if it was for sale. The book man presumed it was. "I am poor," said the priest, "and I can only offer ten dollars for it."

Ten dollars! It was a fortune to young Healy. Thirty years after he was talking with a friend in Washington, who called him by name. An old man in the garb of a priest, who was passing, stopped and said: "I beg your pardon. Are you Mr. Healy, the artist?" "I am," was the answer. Then said the priest: "I think I was one of your first patrons. Do you remember an *Ecce Homo* you exhibited in Boston when you were a mere boy? That picture still hangs in my village church." That chance meeting was one of great joy to the artist.

The sale of the *Ecce Homo* caused the young artist to begin to paint in earnest. He painted pictures of his mother, his brothers, his sister, and of every one he could get to sit for him. When no one would sit for him he painted pictures of himself. Some of these pictures came to the attention of the charming artist, Sully, who praised his work and encouraged him to keep on. This encouragement led to the opening of a studio. He hung out a sign and waited—yea, waited in vain. To pay his rent he induced his landlord to let him paint pictures of the members of his family. These portraits were a success, and other sitters came, but they were all men, and the young artist aspired to paint the portrait of a beautiful woman. A friend gave him a letter of introduction to Mrs. Harrison Gray Otis, then the queen of Boston society, a beautiful and much admired woman. The young painter was very bashful on meeting strangers, and it is told of him that when he went to present the letter at the imposing home, he looked at the bell and took to his heels. Later he forced himself to ring the bell and to send word that a gentleman wanted to see Mrs. Otis on business. Mrs. Otis took the note and with a very sweet smile asked, "What can I do to serve you, Mr. Healy?" "Sit for me, madam. I do so want to paint the picture of a beautiful woman." Mrs. Otis laughed, showed her beautiful teeth, and consented to sit. The happy young artist painted her portrait laughing, just as he saw her on that memorable day.

And now the artist must go to Paris; and notwithstanding many great difficulties, to Paris he went. On his way through

New York he called on Samuel F. B. Morse, who had attained some success as a painter before he became an inventor. Mr. Morse told him that going to Paris to become a painter is a foolhardy undertaking, and added, "You will never make salt for your porridge." The young man answered, "Then, Mr. Morse, I must eat my porridge without salt," and continued on his way. On reaching Paris he studied carefully and hard. He copied the work of the old masters, and his work was so well done that some of it readily sold. During this student period Mr. Healy became a French painter and to see things from the French point of view. He lived like his comrades, many of them poor as himself, sharing their labors and their hopes, their pleasures and their fears. It was a time both singularly interesting as well as varied. With two young French artists he made a walking tour through France and Switzerland, sketching and painting as they went. On this trip he made the acquaintance of an English family, who later invited him to England. Through this family he obtained important sittings, one of them being from no less a personage than the Duke of Sussex, an uncle of Queen Victoria, and later from a sister of the Duke of Cumberland. Then his real work as an artist began.

While in England a change came into Mr. Healy's life. Of this, he said: "It was while I was at work in London that I first met my wife. I had become acquainted with a Mrs. Hanley, who one day brought her sister, Miss Louisa Phipps, to my studio. I met them on the stairs, as I was running to keep an engagement. I gave them the key to my room and excused myself. This glimpse on the stairs fixed my future destinies. In the summer of 1839 I was recalled to Paris, and I asked Miss Phipps to go with me as my wife. We had no time for wedding preparations, and we were both too poor to think of anything but our happiness. With a hundred dollars in my pocket by way of fortune, I took my wife, who had not a penny of her own, to Paris.

Soon after arriving in Paris Mr. Healy obtained a sitting from General Lewis Cass, the American Minister in France. Through General Cass he obtained sittings from Louis Phil-

ippe, then King of France. King Louis was making a collection of paintings of celebrated men for the palace at Versailles. He gave Mr. Healy an order to copy Stuart's Washington and to paint the portraits of other great American statesmen, which required a trip to his home land.

In the year 1855 the Healys came to America to live, and they made their home in Chicago from 1856 to 1867. These for Mr. Healy were very busy years, notwithstanding the intervening Civil War. In 1867 the Healys went to Europe for a short holiday visit, but so numerous were the calls from sitters that the family did not return to Chicago until 1892. During these twenty-five years the artist was very busy, never being without orders for pictures. Mr. Healy and his family lived in Rome from 1868 until 1873, and in France from that time until 1892, the artist in the meantime making several professional visits to England and the United States.

When Mr. Healy returned to Chicago to live in 1892 he was in his eightieth year, and it was with great pleasure and satisfaction that he looked back over his long and profitable artistic career and let his memory call before him his numerous illustrious sitters. Let us watch them as they pass. Among them, besides those already mentioned, are five French statesmen, five English statesmen, the great Bismarck, the explorer, Stanley; the noted musician, Liszt; Pope Pius IX; the King and Queen of Roumania, the latter known in the world of letters as Carmen Sylva; William B. Ogden, the first mayor of Chicago; the American statesmen, Webster, Calhoun, Clay, Seward and Douglas; Generals Sherman and Sheridan; Admiral Porter; the great bird man, Audubon; the poet, Longfellow; the historian, Prescott; the novelist, Hawthorne; the actress, Mary Anderson; Cardinals Gibbons and McCloskey; twelve Presidents of the United States, among them John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant and Chester A. Arthur.

Though best known as a portrait painter, Mr. Healy gained eminence in landscape and marine painting and in pictures that represent everyday life and manners. He was also very successful in making copies of the old masters. He also

painted several historical pictures, which brought him considerable fame, among them being Webster's reply to Hayne, in the United States Senate, which contains 150 portraits, and is now in Faneuil Hall, Boston; Franklin urging the claims of the American Colonies before the court of the French King, Louis XVI, which was burned in the great Chicago fire. Another of his paintings deserving special mention as a work of art and for its historical importance is one which he called *The Peace Makers*. It represented the meeting of President Lincoln, General Grant, General Sherman and Admiral Porter at General Grant's headquarters, after General Sherman's march to the sea. This picture was owned by the Calumet Club of Chicago, and was burned in 1902, when the club house was destroyed by fire.

I now come to what is to me a very interesting chapter in this sketch of the artist, Healy. During Mr. Healy's residence in Chicago he formed a very close and intimate friendship with Mr. Ezra B. McCagg, then a very prominent man in Chicago and in the State of Illinois as well. Mr. Healy said that Mr. McCagg was one of his dearest and kindest friends, and added: "Of all the boons that Heaven bestows on humanity, few are more precious than that of perfect friendship." Mr. McCagg was for several years president of the board of trustees of the Illinois Hospital for the Insane at Kankakee. Through Mr. Healy, Mr. McCagg became interested in art, and through Mr. McCagg, Mr. Healy became interested in the Kankakee Hospital and its inmates. It was Mr. Healy's habit, during his long life, to make copies of his paintings for his own pleasure and the pleasure of his friends. His friendship for Mr. McCagg and his interest in the Kankakee Hospital, through Mr. McCagg, induced him to donate nearly eighty exceedingly fine paintings to that institution. In acknowledgement of this donation the trustees had the following spread upon the records of their meeting February 9, 1892:

"The trustees desire to place on record their profound sense of the generosity and benevolence of the eminent artist,

G. P. A. Healy, in bestowing upon this institution a collection of nearly eighty examples of his splendid art.

"These beautiful pictures will be a light and a joy forever to the many patients who shall come here to be restored, and will often aid in that restoration, and for the hapless ones who must permanently remain they will serve to relieve many a gloomy hour and furnish a companionship the noblest and most comforting.

"We are sure it must be a satisfaction to the artist to have his memory perpetuated by joining hands with the State in a work so worthy and to add to his world-wide fame as a painter the even higher glory of a lover of his kind.

"The other members of the board of trustees desire also in this connection to place on record their appreciation of the kind action of the president (Mr. Ezra B. McCagg, of Chicago) in suggesting to Mr. Healy his generous gift, this being only another evidence of his interest in the institution, whether he be at home or abroad."

In a recent statement Dr. George A. Zeller says: "This collection of paintings is now valued at close to \$100,000.00, but as they will never be thrown on the market, no market price will ever be established." Dr. Zeller also says: "It is a source of gratification that although these pictures have hung on the walls of an insane hospital for more than twenty years, none are missing or seriously damaged."

One of the paintings is a portrait of Mrs. Harrison Gray Otis, the Boston social leader. Mrs. Otis was the first to celebrate Washington's birthday. By her efforts the Massachusetts Legislature was induced to make the 22d of February a legal holiday. Of special beauty is the figure piece called Children in the Garden, and the one called Come to Mamma. The latter contains portraits of the artist's daughter and grand-daughter.

Mr. Healy died in Chicago, Illinois, June 24, 1894. He kept painting until eight days before his death. Mrs. Healy died in Chicago February 7, 1905. At the time of Mr. Healy's death there were living one son, George, and four daughters, Agnes, Mary, Edith and Kathleen. The son lives in France.

Edith married Judge Lysander Hill, of Chicago. She is now a widow. She is the author of two books on art. Agnes and Mary married Frenchmen. Agnes is now dead. Mary is the author of *Loakeville*, *Storm Driven* and other popular novels. She is now a widow and lives with her sister, Mrs. Hill, in Chicago. Kathleen, now Mrs. C. H. Besley, lives in Hinsdale, Illinois.

A large number of Mr. Healy's paintings were on exhibition at the World's Fair in Chicago. Several of his best paintings were given by him to the Newberry Library in Chicago, among them being those of Sherman, Grant and Lincoln. In a letter from Mrs. Hill, one of Mr. Healy's daughters, she writes: "We daughters arranged a centenary exhibition of our father's works, which was held with wonderful success January 3, 1913, at the Art Institute in Chicago. All lovers of art in Chicago came to pay tribute to his memory."

It has often been said that the histories are full of errors. The officials of the Public Charities Service of Illinois issue a publication called *The Institution Quarterly*. In the issue in June, 1915, there is an article by Dr. George A. Zeller on the Healy paintings in the Kankakee Hospital, in which he says: "There was a great tragedy in Mr. Healy's life. The Kankakee institution was the stage on which it was acted. It formed the inspiration of some of these paintings." On reading this I became interested, and I asked Mr. Sandham to write to Dr. Zeller and make inquiry about the great tragedy in Mr. Healy's life. In answer, Dr. Zeller wrote:

"Springfield, September 9, 1915.

William R. Sandham, Wyoming Illinois:

Dear Sir—I am very glad to have your letter relative to the Healy paintings. Mr. Healy's wife was insane many years, and it was the realization of the dreariness of the lives of the insane that prompted him to donate the paintings.

His daughter is alive and I will try to secure her address for you.

I long admired the Healy paintings, and as soon as I went on the board I decided to have them appreciated at their true

value, and I secured the catalogue from Dr. Dewey and prepared an article for the Quarterly.

Very respectfully,

GEORGE A. ZELLER."

Two days later we received the following letter:

"Springfield, September 11, 1915.

William R. Sandham, Wyoming, Illinois:

Dear Sir—Your letter of September 1st, addressed to Dr. Zeller, has been referred to me.

The great tragedy in Mr. Healy's life was the insanity of his wife. Mrs. Healy, for a number of years, was a patient in the Kankakee State Hospital. These paintings by Mr. Healy were given to the institution because of this fact, and because of his friendship for Mr. Ezra B. McCagg, who was at that time president of the Board of Trustees of that institution.

The other question that you asked I cannot answer. I suggest that you write to the president of the Chicago Art Institute and ask him for the name and address of Mr. Healy's daughter, who is still living. From her you will be able to get the facts about the family. Yours respectfully,

A. L. BOWEN,

Executive Secretary, State Charities Commission."

A few days later we received from one of the officials of the Art Institute the address of one of Mr. Healy's daughters. Mr. Sandham wrote to this daughter and asked when and how long her mother was in the Kankakee Hospital. I quote from a letter received from her:

"How the idea came to you that my mother was insane, I do not know. She was the loveliest and most normal woman you can imagine. She never even visited in Kankakee. She and my father had an ideal married life. He always said that if he was able to put aside any money it was due entirely to her, as she knew how to manage; whereas, he was so open-handed that he never knew what became of the large sums that came to him through his incessant work."

Mr. Sandham wrote to her again and told her about the article in the Institution Quarterly and the letters from Dr. Zeller and Mr. Bowen. In a few days we received a second letter, from which I quote:

"Many thanks for the information about the article by Dr. Zeller concerning my father. I have written to Mr. Bowen and asked him to send me a copy of the Institution Quarterly in which the article appeared. If there ever was a tragedy in our family, it was wonderfully concealed, for we none of us ever heard of one. My father and mother were always very happy. They brought up their family with great care and gave each one of us all the education he or she could take. We lived in Paris, France, for twenty years, and it was there Mr. E. B. McCagg, who was my father's most intimate friend, asked him to give a collection of pictures to the Kankakee Hospital for the Insane, of which institution Mr. McCagg was then president of its Board of Trustees. Mr. McCagg easily convinced my father of the benefit to the insane of such a gift and the gift was made."

In a letter written October 27, 1915, the daughter says:

"I wrote to Mr. Bowen about the strange story concerning my dear mother. He has promised to have it corrected."

And now the Tuesday Club, as a result of the selection of this as one of the subjects for its programme for 1915-1916, can truly claim the honor of having corrected a grievous error in Illinois history.